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ABSTRACT

A survey conducted as part of the continuous review of Eastern Montana College's teacher preparation program produced written responses from 62 classroom teachers, 8 principals, and 9 superintendents from rural schools in 4 Montana counties, who strongly supported the need for specialized preparation for rural teachers. Respondents recommended that preparation programs for rural teachers should include: (1) training for teaching multi-grade classes; (2) a strong background in teaching reading; (3) methods courses and practicum experiences in teaching art, music, health, physical education, and dramatics; (4) specialized training in more than one academic discipline; (5) better training in handling classroom discipline with various age groups; (6) training in utilizing rural community resources for classroom enrichment; (7) multi-grade level curriculum planning; (8) diagnostic and planning skills to identify and meet students needs; (9) sociological implications for teachers living and working in rural communities; and (10) preparation for school record maintenance. Specific recommendation for a special track for students intending to teach in rural schools included a methods course on teaching in rural schools, a seminar on educational sociology for rural school practitioners, a seminar on developing effective school-community relations, appropriate laboratory and clinical experiences, and student teaching in a rural school. (NEC)

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RECOMMENDATIONS TO TEACHER EDUCATORS

FOR

PREPARING FUTURE TEACHERS FOR CAREERS IN RURAL SCHOOLS

BY

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MARCH 1980

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RC 012958

THE QUESTION:

Is there a need for developing teacher preparation programs designed specifically for rural schools in Montana?

INTRODUCTION:

This survey was conducted as a part of the continuous review process of the teacher preparation program at Eastern Montana College.

Montana is the fourth largest state in the nation, having an area of 147,138 square miles. The state is predominantly rural, with an estimated population of 760,000 people as of 1977. Of the fifty-six counties within the state only six counties have a population density of ten or more people per square mile. In the 1979-80 school year there were 104 one teacher schools in the state. Furthermore, a large percentage of the total number of school districts in Montana enroll less than 100 students. Rural education in Montana is definitely worthy of the attention of teacher educators in this state.

METHODOLOGY:

Telephone calls were made to 10 rural school superintendents requesting their participation in answering a brief questionnaire. In addition, permission was obtained from the superintendents to meet personally with their teachers and principals to explain the intent of the survey and to obtain their written comments to a second questionnaire. Three county school superintendents also participated in the survey completing the same questionnaire sent to the ten rural superintendents.

SCHOOL SURVEYED:

Absarokee, Montana	Fromberg, Montana	Rapelji, Montana
Bridger, Montana	Hardin, Montana	Red Lodge, Montana
Columbus, Montana	Joliet, Montana	Shepherd, Montana
		Worden, Montana

County Superintendent, Big Horn County, Montana
County Superintendent, Carbon County, Montana
County Superintendent, Yellowstone County, Montana

All the schools surveyed are located in Big Horn, Carbon, Stillwater or Yellowstone County.

Superintendent Questionnaire

1. The following questionnaire was sent to 10 rural superintendents. Nine questionnaires were returned completed. (N=10) 90% Response.

   a) In your estimation do the teacher education institutions prepare students to be effective teachers in rural schools as compared with preparing them to take positions in urban school settings?

   b) Are the teachers who are currently employed in your school system "generally" lacking any specific skills which in your estimation are important to being effective classroom teachers in 1980?

   c) What can the teacher training institutions do to assist rural school administrators in staff development?

   d) Is the Office of Public Instruction helpful to rural school administrators and teachers? In what ways?

   e) Which institutions and/or organizations do you find of value to you as a rural school superintendent? (example: Office of Public Instruction, colleges/universities, county agencies, etc.)

   f) In what ways have you found them to be of value to you as the superintendent?

Rural Teacher and Principal Questionnaire

The second questionnaire was distributed personally to sixty-five rural classroom teachers and ten school principals at the time of the school visitations. The majority of these questionnaires were returned by mail, and five questionnaires were not returned. Of these five questionnaires two represented principals and three represented teachers. This part of the survey accounted for 70 responses, (N=75) 93% Response.

As the Dean of the School of Education at Eastern Montana College, I would like your suggestions in regard to the design of our (Secondary/Elementary) teacher preparation program at Eastern Montana College. Is there a need for developing a special teacher preparation program for rural (Secondary/Elementary) school teachers as compared to preparing (Secondary/Elementary) teachers for large metropolitan school systems? What specific suggestions do you have?

Recommendations from Rural Classroom Teachers and Administrators

1. Students preparing for a teaching career in rural schools should be required to master the skill of teaching in multi-grade classrooms. The majority of the respondents reported this to be the biggest void in regular teacher preparation programs.
2. Students need a strong background in the teaching of reading. The respondents to this survey were prepared as teachers in a variety of institutions in Montana and in a variety of institutions out of the state. It was significant to note by their replies that the majority of the respondents indicated that they received very minimal preparation in the teaching of reading and felt this continues to be a definite weakness in teacher preparation programs in general today.
3. Elementary teachers in rural schools are commonly expected to teach art, music, health and physical education, library skills,

dramatics, etc. in addition to teaching the three R's. Therefore, methods courses and early practicum experiences should be designed by the institution to provide adequate preparation for students to demonstrate competency in these areas. Students should be provided the opportunity to visit rural classrooms to observe teachers demonstrating the teaching of these various subjects.

4. Secondary teachers preparing for careers in rural schools should realize that highly specialized training in only one academic discipline often times restricts their marketability for employment. In the great majority of rural schools it is almost imperative that a rural secondary teacher teach in at least two academic disciplines and often times carry additional assignments. One rural high school teacher teaching in a high school that enrolled less than 50 pupils reported that 95% of the training she received in her teacher training program prepared her to deal with 5% of her actual teaching responsibilities, mainly because her training prepared her only as a subject matter specialist. A high school teacher in another rural high school reported, "I teach Business Education, administer the guidance program, coach basketball, and track, serve as Senior Class Advisor, and sponsor the National Honor Society." The range of responsibilities that go along with a teaching contract in a rural school may shock some students preparing for a teaching career in a rural community.

5. Almost everyone of the 79 respondents stated that students preparing for careers in rural schools need better training in

handling classroom discipline with various age groups of children.

6. Students need specialized training how to effectively use the resources in a rural community to enrich their classroom programs.

7. Students should be required to demonstrate how they would effectively plan a curriculum for a multi-grade level setting.

8. Students should be required to demonstrate their competency to diagnose individual student needs and effectively plan meaningful programs to meet these needs.

9. Students should understand the sociological implications for a teacher living and teaching in a small rural community in contrast to living and teaching in a large metropolitan community.

10. Students should be prepared to maintain a variety of school records, attendance records, test records, health records, equipment and supply records, and often time county and state records.

Analysis of Recommendations

The analysis of the written responses included responses from 9 school superintendents, 8 school principals, and 62 classroom teachers.

The repsonsibilities of a rural classroom teacher in many ways appears to be analogous with the country doctor. Both, may very well be classified as "general practitioners." The professional training of rural teachers should prepare them to teach multi-grade classes. This would not be true for all rural classroom teachers in Montana since some

rural schools cannot be distinguished in operation from an urban school except for their location. Teachers who teach in large urban area schools are generally considered grade level specialists, first grade teachers, fourth grade teachers, sixth grade teachers, high school English teachers, high school mathematics teachers, etc., and therefore need more of a specialized training program beamed at a specific grade level or subject area. For the most part, rural schools in Montana are not financed nearly as well as urban schools. Thomas (1974: p 2) states that the administrative cost per pupil in school districts of up to 600 pupils are approximately twice that of districts with more than 25,000 pupils. In 1979, Muse reported that teachers in rural western high schools felt that their preservice education did not adequately prepare them for the curricula demands and poor facilities encountered in rural schools. Edington and Musselman (1969) reported that rural teachers tend not to have advanced degrees, are often poorly trained in curricula and guidance principles and are unfamiliar with the unique problems of rual schools. Similar conditions prevail at the national level according to Estes, 1967.

To be sure, all teachers need certain generic competencies, competencies which are common to all teachers regardless of what they teach, who they teach, or where they teach. For example all teachers should be knowledgeable in the area of learning theories, so that they are well qualified to promote a productive learning environment for their students. A learning oriented classroom environment presupposes a host of other generic competencies such as the teachers ability to maintain discipline, to motivate students, to apply appropriate evaluative techniques pertaining to pupil progress, to teach academic content with ease and skill, etc. Students preparing to teach in rural schools should

receive professional preparation specially designed for this challenging career. This specially designed segment of their teacher preparation program should include on campus and off campus experiences designed specifically to meet the challenges of teaching in a rural school.

Designing a Special Track in the Regular Teacher Education Program for Students Preparing to Teach in Rural Schools.

In addition to the core of professional education courses required for the general track of students preparing to teach in elementary, secondary, or special education positions, it appears that students preparing to teach in rural schools are in many cases, faced with unique responsibilities on the job, that to a degree these unique responsibilities are common to all rural classroom teachers, and for the most part they are not common to teachers in an urban school setting. Teacher educators should be aware of this fact and take necessary steps to meet the professional training needs of students preparing to teach in rural schools. The recommendations that came forth from the rural teachers, principals, and superintendents, in this study appears to substantiate this claim.

I offer the following programmatic considerations that may be included in any teacher preparation program, as a means of meeting the special needs of students preparing for teaching careers in rural schools.

STUDENTS INTENDING TO TEACH IN RURAL SCHOOLS WILL BE URGED TO COMPLETE THE THREE FOLLOWING ELECTIVES:

1. Methods Course for Preparing to Teach in a Rural School (Elective) - This course is specially designed to provide students

preparing to teach in rural schools a variety of experiences relating to the effective presentation of academic subject matter materials to students in a multi-grade school setting. This course includes observation of rural school teachers in action, along with laboratory and clinical experiences on campus, and off campus under the guidance of experienced staff. This course is team taught by college faculty and rural classroom teachers.

2. Seminar - Educational Sociology for the Rural School Practitioners (Elective) -

This elective course would attempt to provide students an overview of the sociological implications for a teacher living and working in a rural community. It would be highly desirable to include guest speakers from rural communities as a part of this class.

3. Seminar – Developing Effective School Community Relations (Elective) -

This elective course would attempt to provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively use the community as an important resource for enriching the school program. The rural school is often times isolated from educational, governmental, and economic support systems found in urban areas and lacks the benefits and assistance of cultural institutions, health centers and other human service agencies. Rural teachers, school administrators, school board members, community business representatives and social and fraternal organization representatives, will participate as resource lecturers for this class.

SPECIAL Required Course TRACK

1. Laboratory and Clinical Experiences for Students Preparing for a Career in Rural Education.

This course will relate theory to practice. Students will be provided field experiences in rural school settings and specially-designed on-campus clinical experiences prior to doing student teaching. Students will be given the opportunity to observe activities and participate in teacher activities in a regular rural classroom environment. Clinical experiences on campus will be provided to involve the student in the diagnosis and treatment of teacher-related problems with simulated conditions.

2. Student Teaching

Students preparing for a career in rural education will be assigned to complete their student teaching in a rural school.

SUMMARY:

The sampling of rural teachers and administrators contacted in this Montana study strongly supports the need for a specialized teacher preparation program for rural teachers. These recommendations might be carefully weighed by teacher educators nationally.

It only appears to be logical that the preparation of teachers and other school personnel should be examined periodically to consider the professional demands faced by these people. As times change in our society and new demands are placed upon the educational personnel in the schools, it becomes necessary for our teacher preparation institutions to lead the way in reshaping their programs to meet these changing professional needs.

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9. APPENDIX I - Number of Persons Per Square Mile, Montana Counties - 1970.

APPENDIX 1

NUMBER OF PERSONS PER SQUARE MILE, MONTANA COUNTIES

1970

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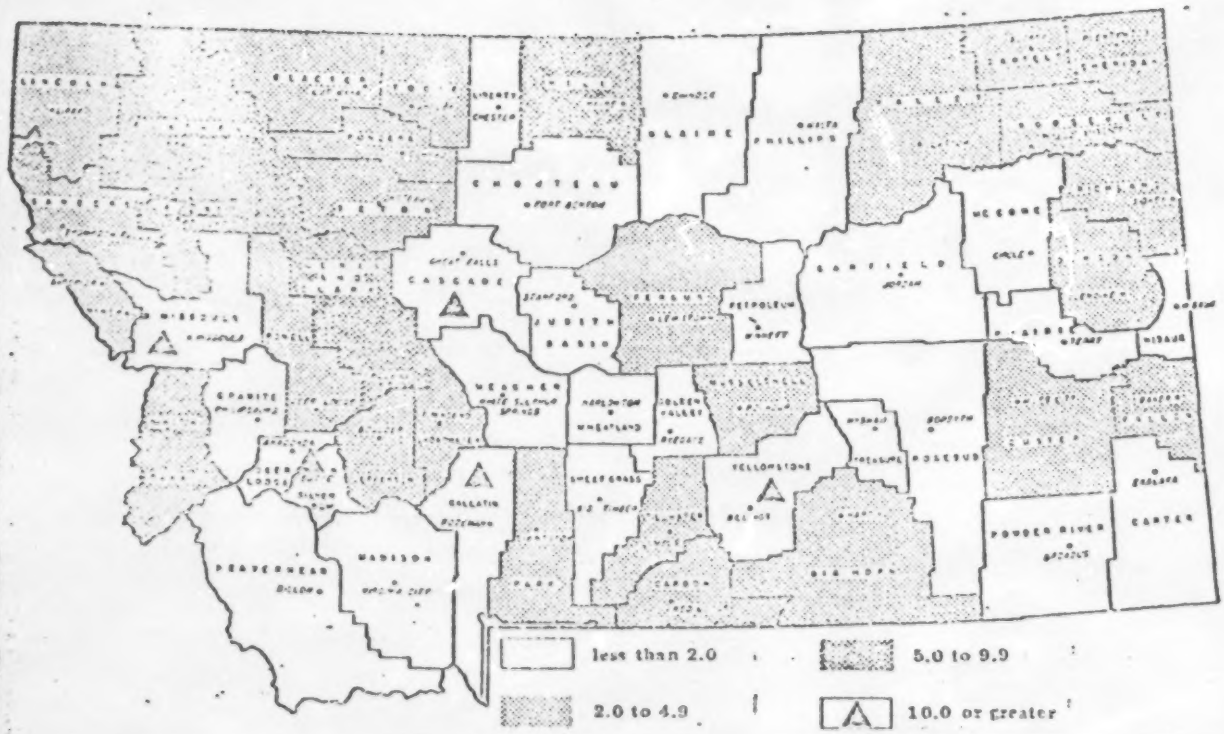

Beaverhead	1.5	Granite	1.6	Powell	2.8
Big Horn	2.0	Hill	5.9	Prairie	1.0
Blaine	1.6	Jefferson	3.2	Ravalli	6.0
Broadwater	2.0	Judith Basin	1.4	Richland	4.7
Carbon	3.4	Lake	8.7	Roosevelt	4.3
Carter	0.6	Lewis & Clark	9.5	Rosebud	1.2
Cascade	30.6	Liberty	1.6	Sanders	2.5
Choteau	1.6	Lincoln	4.8	Sheridan	3.4
Custer	3.2	McCone	1.1	Silver Bow	58.6
Daniels	2.1	Madison	1.4	Stillwater	2.6
Dawson	4.7	Meagher	0.9	Sweet Grass	1.6
Deer Lodge	21.1	Mineral	2.4	Teton	2.6
Fallon	2.5	Missoula	22.2	Toole	3.0
Fergus	3.0	Musselshell	2.0	Treasure	1.1
Flathead	7.5	Park	4.3	Valley	2.2
Gallatin	12.8	Petroleum	0.4	Wheatland	1.8
Garfield	0.4	Phillips	1.0	Wibaux	1.6
Glacier	3.6	Pondera	4.0	Yellowstone	32.8
Golden Valley	0.8	Powder River	0.9		